

430      EMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST  
AND REFORMER

sound the Americans, telling them that you  
-will supply the most  
lively and interesting book I have yet  
written."

About this time Zola also gave some attention to a four-act lyrical drama entitled "Messidor,"<sup>1</sup> the music of which was composed by his friend M. Alfred Bruneau.<sup>2</sup> This work took the novelist to the Grand Opera House, where it was to be produced. He attended all the rehearsals, and evinced particular interest in the young women of the ballet, about whom — their appearance, manners, conversation, and lives — he accumulated a quantity of notes, with the object, so he afterwards told Vizetelly, of writing a novel about them, a novel which he would probably have called "Le Eat," — *rats de V Opera*, being the name under which the minor dancers of the house have long been, known in Paris. It may be mentioned that a ballet designed for expressive character-dancing was a prominent feature of "Messidor," and that success largely depended on its efficient performance. But the authors found the *corps de ballet* wedded to the stereotyped forms of stage-dancing, the customary insipid *jete\$, pecs de ckales, entrechats, pirouettes*, and so forth. Either from incapacity or in a spirit of obstinacy, the ladies of the opera would not modify their methods, and Zola, who had dreamt of revolutionising stage-dancing, of infusing into it some of the old Grecian fervour,

which expressed the various passions so powerfully, was greatly disappointed. When "Messidor" was produced on February 19, 1897, it achieved little more than a *succfa d'es-*

<sup>1</sup> "Messidor" was the tenth or harvest month in the calendar of the First Republic.

<sup>2</sup> The writer does not know when Zola wrote the libretto of "Messidor" ; but it seems likely that he did so in 1894 or 1895, for M. Bruneau must have subsequently required considerable time for the music.